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ABSTRACT

An interpersonal perception mode of analysis can provide insight into a playscript, eliminating the protagonist-oriented view of drama and creating a dramatic production with richer texture. Since drama represents its characters' inabilities to process information satisfactorily or to maintain successful interpersonal relationships, all the characters are equally involved and responsible. This may be seen when examining "Long Day's Journey Into Night." The play is replete with examples of the four characters' avoiding confrontations among themselves, dealing with content issues rather than with the process issues which have made their lives wretched. In addition, the characteristics attempt, to a great extent, to shut off abruptly verbal communications by the other characters, thus invalidating the perceptions of the other characters. A recent production of this play in which all characters jointly shared responsibility for the problems forming the drama's matrix seemed a more satisfying experience than that provided by an earlier production depicting the traditional protagonist. (JM)

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AN INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION APPROACH TO LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

by

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Approximately one year ago there was televised on one of the national networks a production of Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night, directed by Laurence Olivier, who also acted the role of James Tyrone. As I watched the production, I was struck by what appeared to be some marked differences between it and what I could recall of the older filmed version of the play which "starred" Katharine Hepburn as Mary Tyrone. One of the first differences seemed to be that there were no "stars" in the Olivier production. Rather, it seemed to be transmitting a sense of egalitarian participation in the drama by all of the characters. Searching my memroy for additional specifics, I recalled that the Hepburn film seemed not only to be dominated by the character of Mary Tyrone, but that the two parents were portrayed as having "caused" most of the troubles besetting the family. The two offspring, Jamie and Edmund, were portrayed essentially as victims rather than as co-responsible participants in the family's survival problems.

In the more recent production, however, all of the characters participated equally in, and jointly shared responsibility for, the pathologies forming the matrix of the drama. The behaviors (communications) of the characters were reciprocal and 4-way interactional, rather than only results of the behaviors (communications) of the parent-pair. It was evident that two quite different views of the play had governed decisions about the two productions. The Olivier production--the one which did not suggest a production concept embodying the idea of "star performances"--seemed somehow to be a more satisfying experience.

In a view of O'Neill's play in which the characters interact as in a complete system, all of whose components provide inputs which are processed through the system to emerge as outputs (behavioral consequences) accompanied by feedback loops which simultaneously influence the system's inputs, it is possible to rid ourselves of the traditional "protagonist" (authority figure,

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prime mover, responsible party, etc.) view of drama and to take a more complex, more interesting, and possibly more complete, analytic position toward an interchange such as the following:

MARY: If there was only some place I could go to get away for a day, or even an afternoon, some woman friend I could talk to--not about anything serious, simply laugh and gossip and forget for a while--someone besides the servants--that stupid Cathleen!

EDMUND: Stop it, Mama. You're getting yourself worked up over nothing.

MARY: Your father goes out. He meets his friends in barrooms or at the Club. You and Jamie have the boys you know. You go out. But I am alone. I've always been alone.

EDMUND: Come now! You know that's a fib. One of us always stays around to keep you company, or goes with you in the automobile when you take a drive.

MARY: Because you're afraid to trust me alone!

In the traditional, protagonist-oriented production context, we can assume that Mary "is" a weak woman, that because of certain societal perquisites and certain "flaws" in her own character as well as some of the consequences of having been treated as an appendage by her equally "flawed" husband, she is not to be trusted alone. Thus, though Edmund's response is insulting, he must deal with the "reality" of the situation and accompany his weak mother in a reversed child-parent relationship. In this view Edmund is relieved of responsibility for having contributed to the creation of the situation (system) which encloses both of them.

If we take a more systemic stance, without excessive concern for "where it began," we can perceive that both Edmund and Mary are contributing to a situation which has ensnared both of them. Mary has a legitimate complaint: she wants to get out of the house. Edmund's response is that her desire amounts to "nothing." His analysis of his mother's problem actually reinforces the existence of the problem, and the bizarre behavior which follows (Mary has no available channel for non-bizarre behavior, as long as people deny her validity)

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will in turn reinforce Edmund's conviction that his mother is a loony who cannot be trusted. The behavior (communication) patterns are circular and reciprocal—one interactant extracts behavior from the other, and that extracted behavior influences the response of the first interactant, etc. There is no "protagonist"; there is no heroic figure battling the fates; the linear view of the dramatic character's (and dramatic plot's) development is no longer operative because linearity has been supplanted by reciprocity.

The preceding, somewhat oversimplified, example of an approach to a sequence in a dramatic script is illustrative of the direction of this paper. As its title indicates, it is only an approach, and not yet a method. It suggests that the concept of interpersonal perception can be a useful tool for enlarging the ways in which—to borrow a phrase from George Gunkle—we talk about the problems of playscript analysis. It is aimed primarily at play directors, but because it is process-oriented rather than product-oriented, it very likely speaks to any person involved with or interested in theatre.

The Tyrone family that inhabits O'Neill's play is quite evidently in some very deep trouble with respect to the relationships that govern the family's behavior—it is markedly unsuccessful in achieving a comfortable level of satisfaction within its members. Perhaps more than any other single idea to have emerged from the work of behavioral scientists in the past thirty years is that the human organism's principal function seems to be that of seeking and processing information which will enable the organism to function with maximal satisfaction. A corollary to that idea is that we seem also to be discovering that an optimally healthy general way to construe "satisfaction" is in terms of interpersonal behavior—or interpersonal communication—rather than in terms of instrumental behavior. It may be obvious that I am using the words "behavior" and "communication" as virtually synonymous. In so doing,

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I take my cue from Watzlawick, et. al. (1967) who maintain that all behavior is indeed communication, that it is therefore impossible not to communicate, and that consequently the human creature is constantly communicating. If it is fair to say that genuine satisfaction derives more from interpersonal phenomena than from instrumental phenomena--that is, if the content of a given issue or situation is no more important than, and very likely less important than, the human interaction processes which mediate that issue or situation--then it is necessary to look at the kinds of information which the human organism seeks and processes in order to achieve satisfaction. A major factor contributing to dysfunctional or disturbed communication between and among people is a tendency to focus on "content" information at the expense of "process" information. We no longer believe, for example, that the successful study of group discussion is contingent largely upon such things as developing a puncture-proof argument or throwing masses of factual evidence at the discussants in order to "change" their viewpoints or attitudes. We have, in fact, learned that those two communication behaviors are more likely to produce resentment, hostility, apathy, and any one of a number of other unhealthy byproducts of a "discussion." Instead, we now focus much more on specifically-identified interpersonal processes in order to raise the competence level of people engaged in small group interaction. Bach and Wyden, in The Intimate Enemy, have demonstrated that the specific content of marital arguments and fights is of little consequence in resolving conjugal conflict, as long as the persons involved can learn to deal effectively with the process of communication in the intimate dyad. Marshall McLuhan's "The medium is the message" is by now a cliché in our language.

The kind of information, then, thought should be sought and processed by the human organism as it struggles toward a state of equilibrium or satisfaction

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that will enable it to function most healthily, is related to "process" rather than to "product." The human organism that has achieved such a state of satisfaction, however, is very likely an organism which does not engage in behavior which can be considered "dramatic." Although in the past we have perhaps employed a somewhat different lexicon to describe them, the kinds of behaviors (communications) traditionally associated with "the dramatic" have been those behaviors exemplary of conflict, stress, crisis, imbalance, disequilibrium, and similar sorts of general human dysfunction. At its extreme, dysfunctional human behavior (communication) has assumed such significance that we have called it "tragedy" when it has been formalized in theatrical presentation. It is hard to deny that the communication pathologies experienced by Oedipus and the persons who interacted with him were of rather staggering proportions. The Theban family experienced maximal difficulty in its quest for satisfaction--its failures to seek and process appropriate kinds of information were monumental in their impact. Perhaps that sounds facetious; it is not really intended to be so.

One of the assumptions undergirding this essay is that the "dramatic" value of those representations of humans communicating with one another which we have labeled as "drama" rests at least in part with the extent to which the texture of communication patterns on which a "play" is based are dysfunctional, pathological, or otherwise out of systemic equilibrium.

In other words, a play is a play because it represents in large measure its characters' inabilities or failures to seek and process the kinds of information that are likely to lead to satisfaction. A logical extension of that assumption, of course, is that if and when our culture becomes generally competent at appropriate-information-seeking-and-processing, we either will no longer experience the thing which now we call "drama," or, perhaps, the

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thing that we call "drama" will be quite a different phenomenon. Fortunately for those of us who have engaged our minds with the study, production, and enjoyment of "drama," there are great numbers of people in the culture who seem not able to seek and process information appropriate to the solution of their problems and to the achievement of satisfaction.

Social scientists continue to narrow the gap between "art" and "science" in their conceptual and clinical analyses of human behavior which, on the one hand, appropriate considerable portions of our "dramatic vocabulary," suggesting that in their own work they are seeing more and more of the stuff which concerns us, as people interested in the theatre as an "art form," and on the other hand, provide us with detailed analyses of human communication which can aid us in understanding our own efforts. Erving Goffman has used a theatrical performance framework for the description and analysis of a variety of social behaviors, verbal and nonverbal, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959). "Script analysis" has become a well-defined term in the theory and practice of transactional analysis in psychotherapy, and directors and actors have taken advantage of transactional analysis as a means of analyzing role relationships in the theatre proper. Eric Berne has constructed a model for behavior analysis and modification in which he maintains that "Theatrical scripts are intuitively derived from life scripts, and a good way to start is to consider the connections and similarities between them." (Berne, 1973, p. 35.) Watzlawick, et. al. (1967) presented an analysis of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf as a concise means of "illustrating the theory of interactional systems" (p. 149) underlying their study of human communication patterns and pathologies. Their script analysis drew heavily upon the General Systems Theory formulations of the biologist Bertalanffy (1950) and the psychologist James G. Miller (1955), discussing the behaviors of Martha, George, Honey, and Nick in terms of open

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and closed systems and subsystems, feedback and equifinality, symmetrical and complementary behaviors, and other communication theory constructs. Such studies use dramatic and theatric models to facilitate the clinical investigation of human behavior; theatre researchers in turn have used the constructs developed by the behavioral scientists to facilitate the study of specifically theatre phenomena. I suspect that although there appear to be some differences between the thing that we call a "play" and the thing that we call a "clinical example of pathological communication," in a really worthwhile play those differences are largely quantitative rather than largely qualitative. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson seem to have recognized something of the nature of those differences when they used Albee's play as a particularly economical model for describing system effects in clinical situations of pathological human communication:

> Transcripts of hours and hours of family interviews, for instance, would be prohibitively bulky and would be biased by both the therapist's point of view and by the therapeutic context. Unedited "natural history" data would carry the lack of limits to unusable extreme. Selecting and summarizing is not a ready answer either, for this would be biased in such a way as to deny the reader the right to observe this very process of selection. The second major goal, in addition to manageable size, is thus reasonable independence of the data, that is, independence of the authors themselves, in the sense of being publicly accessible.
>
> Edward Albee's unusual and well-known play seems to satisfy both these criteria. The limits of the data presented in the play are fixed by artistic license, though the play is possibly even more real than reality, a "fire in the soggy ashes of naturalism" . . . and all the information is available to the reader. (pp. 149-150.)

Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) have developed a scheme for the analysis of communication between persons--a scheme which is based on the fundamental notion that in a dyad, the behaviors and the experiences of the two persons composing the dyad are functions of the interactions of their two experiences and behaviors. Expanding that a bit, and quoting the authors directly,

> . . . Peter's behaviour towards Paul is in part a function of Peter's experiences of Paul. Peter's experience of Paul is in part a function of Paul's behaviour towards Peter. Paul's behaviour towards Peter is

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> in turn partly a function of his experience of Peter, which in turn is in part a function of Paul's behaviour towards him. . . . if Peter and Paul are persons, the behaviour of each towards the other is mediated by the experience by each of the other, just as the experience of each is mediated by the behaviour of each. (pp. 9-10.)

The outcomes of a behavioral (communicational) situation is dependent not so much on the content or the issue that initiated the situation as they are upon the perceptions of the two interactants by each of them:

> Whatever the issue between two persons, love or hate, admiration or contempt, concern or neglect, the method presented in this book comes to terms with the way in which one person's position is experienced by the other, so that the first may become aware of how he looks in the eyes of the other. (Foreword, p. v.)

Just one of the corollaries to this mode of analysis is that one's self-identity can become thoroughly confounded if there is serious disjunction between the two sets of perceptions: "It is likely that if Peter's view of Paul is very disjunctive with Paul's view of Paul, . . . then Peter's actions will be addressed to a Paul that Paul does not recognize." (p. 19) In other words, if by fantasising, or by projecting, my perception of you is quite at variance with your own view of you (regardless of which view is "correct"; that kind of "correctness" here is irrelevant), then my behavior toward you will not make any sense to you--I will seem to be communicating with you, but it will be with a you that does not fit your own image of you. Because of the influence of my behavior on your own experience of who and what you "are," it is very likely that you will begin to doubt your own self-concept, and to wonder if perhaps you are loony. At this point, the "content" of our communication is utterly unimportant; the only thing that is important is the communication process in which we are entangled.

In much of traditional dramaturgic analysis, the concept of the protagonist implies the individual battling against an obstacle, exercising his will to seek an objective, and other sorts of individuistic constructions. In an

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interpersonal perception system of analysis, however,

> . . . there is no isolated individual person. The one person, in order to maintain his own self-identity, has to act towards the other, and however adroit a strategist he may be, he can never rely on controlling the other. She wishes to see herself as kind, but he feels her to be cruel. He wants to be helpful; she finds him a nuisance. Each person has to act outwardly in order to achieve and maintain his or her own inner peace. At best this intimate intermeshed coexistence can be reciprocally confirmatory; at worst it is a mish-mash in which both can lose themselves. (p. 27.)

The Interpersonal Perception Method is intended specifically for diagnosing and treating pathological relationships between human beings, and it rapidly become quite complex as it progresses toward analysis of spirals of reciprocal perspectives which incorporate my view of you as well as your view of me (direct perspective), my view of your view of me (metaperspective), and my view of your view of my view of me (meta-metaperspective). The empirical application of the method utilizes a lengthy series of questionnaires oriented largely toward the analysis of dyadic (two-person) interactions and which must be completed by the interactants themselves in order to generate data for analysis. We cannot, at this point, as members of the Tyrone family to complete the questionnaires for us, so we can attempt analysis of the interpersonal perceptions.

Nonetheless, the conceptual underpinnings of Laing's theory suggest at least a very useful way of thinking about the inter-relationships in a system of dramatic characters such as populate Long Day's Journey, and it may be that after playing with the concepts for a time, we can develop some instruments that will allow more extensive and microscopic empirical use of such a theory. For the present two modes of orientation to this script suggest themselves.

For the play director and actors, one of the problems to be dealt with in production is that of emphasis. The information encoded by the playscript is to be transmitted to the audience, and part of the problem of selecting specific channels of transmission is sorting out specific behaviors for emphasis.

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If we perceive the play as a series of communication failures resultant from the characters' inabilities to seek and process the kinds of information which might lead to a greater degree of satisfaction within the interaction unit, one of the questions to ask is, What are some of the ways in which these characters do deal with the interpersonal information which is available to them?

One hypothesis to be explored briefly here is that much of the time in this play, when the situation is such that the characters' communications threaten to bring them to direct confrontation with genuinely interpersonal process issues, they sidestep those confrontations by dealing instead with "content" or instrumental issues. As with persons in a "real" communication situation in which, in order to resolve human problems, it becomes necessary to explore the interpersonal processes, these characters find it difficult or impossible to deal head-on with the perception failures that have led to their current condition of pathology. A scene between James and Mary Tyrone in Act II, scene 2 is illustrative:

The scene begins with Mary's asking James not to go to his Club yet, because "I don't want to be alone." An up-front statement of fear and trembling by Mary that could, in a non-pathological communication situation, elicit such an equally up-front response as "What is it that makes you fear to be alone?" We are not dealing with a non-pathological situation, however; we're dealing with a play. Mary knows immediately that James cannot respond directly to her expression of fear, so she tempers her request by providing James with an instrumental "out"—indicating to him that he is able to "dress in one-tenth the time it takes the boys," and since he has to wait for them to get dressed anyway so that all the males can leave the house together, there's no "reason" why he can't spend a few extra minutes with her. The instrumental "out" momentarily throws James off-balance, so Mary has time to construct another

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instrumentality to further camouflage her intent and thereby control James' behavior: she brings up the subject of Jamie's affinity for booze, and hopes that James hasn't given Jamie any money, because Jamie has a "vile, poisonous tongue . . . when he's drunk . . . ", etc. It works. She's hooked James into the "content" of the constructed issue, and their conversation for the next few lines deals with that content. Mary brightens a bit during this conversation, but neither of them is dealing with their interpersonal situation. In a few moments it again becomes apparent that James is headed upstairs to change his clothes, so Mary, taking her cue from James' line, asks him how she could possibly leave the house: "There is nowhere I could go. Who would I go to see? I have no friends." There's only one way for James to deal with this—it's time for the automobile to become the instrumentality around which they can orient their communication. Although he doesn't like it himself , James bought the car for Mary: "I hoped it would give you pleasure and distract your mind. You used to ride in it every day, but you've hardly used it at all lately. I paid a lot of money I couldn't afford, and there's the chauffeur I have to board and lodge and pay high wages . . . I might as well have thrown the money out the window." He actually said it—he wants to distract her mind! But when Mary does distract her mind, by getting high on morphine, James is mortified, disgusted, ashamed, and understands absolutely nothing about the effect of his behavior upon his wife's behavior. This time it is Mary who is hooked—she picks up the instrumental car issue, and the conversation again continues without either of them confronting the interpersonal process. James finally breaks, however: "For the love of God, for my sake and the boys' sake and your own, won't you stop now?" It's an attempt to deal with the real situation, but a misguided one. Instead of trying to explore the process, all he can do is urge her to stop. Stop what? Stop shooting morphine, but on the previous page he had unwittingly encouraged her to get

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high, by indicating that he wants to "distract her mind." Ironically, the morphine-shooting itself becomes a "content" issue which prevents them from dealing with their interpersonal tangles. James urges her again to "try"--to exercise her will and give up the dope. His view of her is that she still can do that; her view of herself is not only that she cannot, but that she does not want to. His view of himself is that he's a beneficent advice-giver; her view of him is that he's an un-understanding tyrant. The spiral of misperceptions culminates in revenge: Mary will take a drive in the car after all--she'll go to the drugstore and get some more drugs. Both characters end up feeling guilty and ashamed, and farther than ever from solving their real problems. But that's the structure of what, in this play, we call "drama."

I suggest that the play is replete with such examples of characters dealing with instrumental, "content" issues rather than dealing with the process issues that have made their lives wretched. They constantly ask "why" questions related to instrumental issues: Why does mother take dope? Why is Jamie so foul-mouthed? Why is James a tightwad? Each character feels trapped by the behavior of the others, because there are no answers to such questions, but because they think that there must be "answers," or "causes of their problems," they construct essentially dishonest answers that fail to take into account their interpersonal perceptions of one another and of each other's perceptions, and which are rooted in irrelevant instrumental phenomena. Mary gets high "because" James has never provided a good home for her; "because" when Edmund was born it damned near killed her; "because" she wanted to be a concert pianist and couldn't. Jamie behaves badly "because" his mother is on dope; "because" his father's a tightwad; "because" he's jealous of Edmund. James is a tightwad "because" he's had such a struggle to provide a good home for the family. Implicit in these and in all the other attempts to solve their problems are their failures to confront all of their

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perceptions of each other and to understand the differences among those perceptions. Their failures of understanding have permanently mired them in tangles the sum of which, I suppose, we could label as a part of "the human tragedy," except that if we stop <u>there</u> in our efforts at analysis, the play is simply fuzzy. Their interpersonal incompetences and handicaps are monumental accumulations of history of pathological behaviors. The characters cannot stop in mod-life and start asking totally different kinds of questions in their attempts to problem-solve and find satisfaction--they've been communicating in this way for too long, and the resultant patterns seem to be a major component of what we call "drama."

There is one other feature of this play's communication patterns which seems related to this interpersonal perception sort of analysis, and that is the extent to which, throughout the script, characters attempt abruptly to <u>shut off</u> verbal communications by other characters, thereby denying the validity of what the other character is saying, and invalidating the perceptions of the squelched character. This phenomenon occurs, by my count, at least 85 times throughout the play: 39 times by Edmund; 13 times by Mary; twice by Jamie; and 31 times by James. I have listed here, as an illustration, the 19 "invalidation utterances" that occur in Act IV among Edmund, James, and Jamie.

EDMUND: If you're going to start that stuff, I'll beat it. (p. 129)

JAMES: Keep such sentiments to yourself. (132)

JAMES: Be quiet! How dare you talk of something you know nothing about. (140)

JAMES: That's a lie! (140)

JAMES: Shut your mouth right now, or— (140)

JAMES: You lie again! (141)

JAMES: How dare you talk to your father like that . . . (141)

JAMES: That's a lie! You're crazy! (143)

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JAMES: Be quiet! Don't say that to me! (145)

EDMUND: Oh, shut up, will you. (158)

EDMUND: Can it! (161)

EDMUND: Shut up! (161)

EDMUND: Shut up, you damned fool! (163)

EDMUND: Shut up! I don't want to hear-- (165)

EDMUND: Jamie! Cut it out! You're crazy! (166)

EDMUND: Shut up! I'll be God-damned if I'll listen to you any more-- (166)

EDMUND: Keep quiet, can't you, Papa? (167)

EDMUND: Papa! Quit it! (168)

EDMUND: Shut up, Jamie! (168)

There are 32 such invalidations in Act I, 23 in Act II, and 11 in Act III. Considering the data compression characteristic of a playscript, and mentioned by Watzlawick, et. al. as a reason for their choice of the Albee play for their analysis, it seems sufficient to suggest that when communication sequences are punctuated so regularly with peoples' attempts to invalidate other people, that punctuation may be taken as at least an informal measure of communication pathology and that, from a production viewpoint, such punctuation should be taken into account by the director and actors.

This paper has suggested that an interpersonal perception mode of analysis can provide insight into a playscript and that it can provide support for the notion of eliminating the protagonist-oriented view of drama, thereby, it is hoped, creating a richer texture of dramatic information in production. So far, the approach is only suggestive, but the possibility of thinking in this way about a variety of traditionally protagonist-oriented plays is intriguing. Instead, for example, of viewing Death of a Salesman as a play "about" Willy Loman, who, as the play's protagonist, is "ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity"

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(Miller, 1949), we can view that play as a work which embodies the sense of a social unit whose interaction patterns are pathological in that they focus on seeking and processing the wrong kinds of information, and in which all of the characters are equally involved and responsible, we will at least no longer have to participate in defenses of Willy as a contemporary tragic hero, and such a view may result in a far more interesting production. Other plays come to mind, as well: King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Little Murders, That Championship Season, nearly all of Brecht's plays—I may have left out a few, but we'll fill in the gaps as we go along.

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